United Nations

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

General Assembly
Official Records
Fifty-sixth Session
Supplement No. 35 (A/56/35)

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United Nations • New York, 2001

Note

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Letter of transmittal

10 October 2001

Mr. Secretary-General,

The second half of the twentieth century was marked by the struggle of the Palestinian people for the exercise of its fundamental and natural rights. For the past 50 years, the United Nations has been closely involved in and has remained in the forefront of international efforts aimed at resolving the question of Palestine — the core of the conflict in the Middle East. For its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, since its inception in 1975, has continued to work towards the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, namely the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right to return to their homes and property. The Committee's many activities in implementation of the mandate given to it by the General Assembly continue to be devoted to the achievement of this important objective until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are realized in their entirety.

The decade since the Middle East Peace Conference held at Madrid and the beginning of the Oslo peace process has considerably altered the political environment of the Middle East. The parties to the conflict appeared to have succeeded in breaking out of a shell of age-old suspicion and mistrust and to have dedicated themselves to a single goal of attaining a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in their region. The past year, however, has witnessed yet another dramatic and rapid deterioration of the situation on the ground and a complete halt in the peace process. The international community was greatly appalled by the outbreak of violence and the tragic loss of life following the events at Al-Haram al-Sharif that took place in September 2000. The Al-Aqsa intifada has continued throughout the year. These events have seized the attention of the international community, including the General Assembly and the Security Council and our Committee. It was disappointing and frustrating, after 10 gruelling years of peace negotiations, to see the momentum of the peace process wither away.

The Committee fully supports your dedicated and hard work for peace in the Middle East. We have welcomed your intense efforts in the course of the year aimed at bringing the two sides together and salvaging the peace process. The Committee remains hopeful that your leadership will enable the parties to overcome the present difficulties and return to the negotiating table.

In the hope that our Committee's endeavours will make a meaningful contribution to the deliberations of the General Assembly, I have the honour to enclose herewith the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for submission to the General Assembly in accordance with paragraph 5 of its resolution 55/52 of 1 December 2000. The report covers the period from 11 October 2000 to 10 October 2001.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(*Signed*) Papa Louis **Fall**
Chairman of the Committee on the
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People

I. Introduction

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly by resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, with the task of recommending a programme designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights as recognized by the Assembly in resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

2. The recommendations made by the Committee in its first report to the General Assembly[1] were endorsed by the Assembly as a basis for the solution of the question of Palestine. In its subsequent reports,[2] the Committee has continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination. The Committee's recommendations could not be implemented, and the Assembly each year renewed the Committee's mandate and requested it to intensify efforts in pursuit of its objectives.

3. The Committee welcomed the historic breakthrough in the peace process in 1993 and the subsequent important steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the same time, the Committee continued to work towards the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to its own independent State. The Committee also continued to mobilize the needed international assistance and solidarity during the transitional period.

4. In the course of the past year, the situation in the region has been marked by the eruption of the Palestinian intifada in protest over the highly provocative visit of the then opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Al-Haram al-Sharif compound in the Old City of Jerusalem. The year of violent confrontations left hundreds of civilians dead, mostly among Palestinians, and tens of thousands of wounded and permanently disabled, including hundreds of children. The Committee noted that the explosive situation on the ground had been further exacerbated by the rapid deterioration of the Palestinian economy, the dispossessing effects of the Israeli settlement policy and protracted internal and external closures of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee, therefore, joined the international community in stressing the need for the Government of Israel to fulfil its legal obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949 (the Fourth Geneva Convention)[3] and Security Council resolutions. The Committee also reaffirmed that the continued failure on the part of Israel to live up to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention would cause even greater suffering and dispossession to the Palestinian people and would lead to an increased volatility in the entire region.

5. The peace process has remained stalemated since the beginning of 2001. In October-November 2000, the Committee observed with much hope the efforts by various parties in Paris, at Taba and Sharm el-Sheikh to end the violence and resume

the peace negotiations. The Committee noted in that regard the key role played in these endeavours by the United States of America, Egypt, Jordan and the European Union (EU). It welcomed, fully supported and was particularly appreciative of the increased engagement in the course of the year of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Committee was hopeful that the understandings reached by the parties at Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba, Egypt, in October 2000 and January 2001, respectively, would result in curbing and eventually stopping the violence and the return of the two sides to the negotiating table. The establishment in November 2000 of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, led by former United States Senator George Mitchell, was a promising step aimed at resolving the crisis on the ground. It appeared that the sensible and balanced recommendations made by the Mitchell Committee in its report, released in late April 2001, offered a practicable way out of the impasse. Most importantly, both sides have accepted them. However, the Israeli insistence that all violence should cease before the cooling-off period begins and negotiations resume prevented the two sides from breaking out of the deadlock. Subsequent attempts at resuming security cooperation between the two sides, notably the June 2001 proposal by the United States Director of Central Intelligence, also remained inconclusive. A September 2001 meeting at Gaza International Airport between the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority Mr. Yasser Arafat and Israel's Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Shimon Peres was a welcome development and created new expectations of an imminent breakthrough. They agreed to resume security cooperation, take measures to sustain the ceasefire and bring the violence under control. The Committee hoped that the strict adherence by the two sides to the agreed terms and the sustained security coordination work would lead to positive changes on the ground, creating the necessary momentum for the resumption of the peace process. The Committee also welcomed and was greatly encouraged by the statement made on 2 October 2001 by the United States President George Bush concerning the Palestinian State.

6. The aforementioned setbacks notwithstanding and as the crisis persisted, the Committee expressed the view that a stepped-up and more involved assistance of key international actors, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, was warranted in order to help the parties implement the Mitchell Committee recommendations, stop the violence and resume the peace negotiations. As the organ of the General Assembly mandated to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee during the year has strongly supported all multilateral initiatives aimed at ensuring a de-escalation on the ground and a speedy return of the two sides to the resumption of the peace negotiations.

II. Mandate of the Committee

7. The mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was again renewed by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/52 of 1 December 2000, in which the Assembly, inter alia: (a) endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee[4] and requested it to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate; (b) authorized the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session and thereafter; and (c) requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation and support to Palestinian and other non-governmental organizations in order to mobilize international solidarity and support for the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

8. In its resolution 55/53 of 1 December 2000, on the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to carry out its programme of work as detailed in the relevant earlier resolutions, including, in particular, the organization of meetings in various regions with the participation of all sectors of the international community, the further development and expansion of the documents collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, the preparation and widest possible dissemination of publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine, and the provision of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

9. In its resolution 55/54 of 1 December 2000, on the special information programme on the question of Palestine, the General Assembly requested the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat, in full cooperation and coordination with the Committee, to continue, with the necessary flexibility as may be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine, its special information programme for the biennium 2000-2001; and to promote the Bethlehem 2000 Project, within existing resources and until the Bethlehem commemoration comes to a close, including the preparation and dissemination of publications, audio-visual material and further development of the "Bethlehem 2000" site on the United Nations Internet home page.

10. In carrying out its programme of work, the Committee also took into account General Assembly resolution 55/55 of 1 December 2000, in which the Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed the necessity of achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects; expressed its full support for the ongoing peace process; stressed the necessity for commitment to the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process; and stressed the need for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination; the need for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967; and the need for resolving the problem of the Palestine refugees.

III. Organization of work

A. Membership and officers

11. The Committee is composed of the following Member States: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

12. At its 256th meeting, on 1 March 2001, the Committee re-elected Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal) as Chairman, and re-elected Mr. Bruno Eduardo Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) as Vice-Chairmen, and Mr. Walter Balzan (Malta) as its Rapporteur.

13. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted its programme of work for the year 2001.[5]

14. At its 258th meeting, on 18 September 2001, the Committee elected by acclamation Mr. Papa Louis Fall (Senegal) as Chairman, replacing Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), former Chairman of the Committee, who had retired from the diplomatic service of his country.

B. Participation in the work of the Committee

15. As in previous years, the Committee reconfirmed that all States Members and permanent observers to the United Nations wishing to participate in the work of the Committee as observers were welcome to do so. In accordance with established practice, the Permanent Observer of Palestine participated in the work of the Committee as an observer, attended all its meetings and made observations and proposals for consideration by the Committee and its Bureau.

16. In 2001, the Committee again welcomed as observers all the States and organizations that had participated in its work in the preceding year.[6]

IV. Review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine

17. In accordance with its mandate, the Committee continued to follow closely the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to monitor the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee also continued to follow closely the various developments relevant to the peace process following the breakdown in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. The Committee has been particularly worried by the protracted stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, grievous difficulties experienced by the parties in trying to restore the peace process, escalation of violence on the ground and Israel's illegal occupation policies and practices.

18. Throughout the year, the Committee remained hopeful that the peace talks, which had been suspended since late January 2001, would resume. This, however, has not happened, owing to the position on the peace negotiations taken by the new Israeli Government and the continuing violence in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. The Al-Aqsa intifada, as it became known in 2000-2001, had three distinctive characteristics: the rapid escalation of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) operations against the Palestinians; the introduction of a policy of targeted extrajudicial assassinations of Palestinian leaders and activists; and the frequent incursions into areas under full Palestinian control.

19. Since the beginning of the intifada, over 660 Palestinians have been killed by the IDF, security forces and settlers. Some 20,000 Palestinians have been wounded, a great number of them left permanently disabled. In monitoring the situation on the ground on a daily basis, the Committee, on several occasions, voiced its grave concern at the severity of the Israeli military response to the outbreak of Palestinian protest. The Committee noted that during the year, in addition to the use of plastic, rubber-coated metal and live ammunition, the Israeli military, in their attacks against Palestinians, continued to rely on heavy and sophisticated weapons, using them in an excessively harsh and indiscriminate manner. In the course of the past several months, the Committee has noted the alarmingly frequent use by IDF of helicopter gunships, air-to-surface and heavy anti-tank missiles, tanks and missile boats throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. On 18 May 2001, the Government of Israel changed the nature and scale of the conflict by authorizing the use of fighter aircraft against unprotected Palestinian targets. The Committee joined the international community in condemning these and subsequent air attacks as excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate. The Committee also expressed the view that this policy was contrary to the accepted norms of international law. The new policy escalated the violence threatening to expand the conflict.

20. In the course of the past several months, the Israeli security apparatus has resorted to selective assassinations of Palestinian activists and political leaders. The methods used in these Government-authorized operations have varied from special undercover units and snipers to helicopter gunship-fired air-to-surface missiles and other high-tech means. In this regard, the Committee noted with special concern the public statements by some Israeli leaders openly calling for the "liquidation" of the fathers of Palestinian militants. Since December 2000, more than 50 Palestinians have been killed in targeted attacks. These political assassinations often claimed the lives of innocent bystanders, including children. The practice has prompted the international community's immediate and unequivocal condemnation. The Committee stated that the policy of targeted extrajudicial killings of Palestinian

officials by Israeli security forces clearly violated the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and was criminal in nature. The Committee has also received information on continued beatings and other abuse by IDF soldiers, Israeli border police officers and security forces of Palestinian civilians, ranging in age from 3 to 58.

21. Since April 2001, the Committee has observed with great concern what appeared to be an emerging pattern of Israeli incursions into areas under full Palestinian control. The Committee has stated that this type of IDF operations constituted an illegal activity and violated the letter and the spirit of the bilateral agreements signed as part of the peace process. During these massive incursions, IDF was supported by tanks, heavy armoured vehicles, helicopter gunships and bulldozers. The incursions constituted a virtual reoccupation of Palestinian lands, accompanied by the destruction of public and private property in various Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps, including Beit Jala, Hebron, Jenin, Jericho, Khan Yunis, Qalqilya, Rafah, Ramallah, Tulkarm and others. The Committee considered a blatant provocation the taking over on 10 August 2001 of Orient House in East Jerusalem and nine other Palestinian offices in Abu Dis and Al-Eizariyeh, east of the city. Besides being illegal and provocative, this act was aimed at accelerating the process of Judaization of the city — the policy which Israel has been pursuing since 1967. In a simultaneous incursion that took place on 18 September 2001, in the north and south of the Gaza Strip, Israeli tanks and a bulldozer drove into an area south of Gaza City where a seaport was under construction, tearing down the fence and destroying the premises of the seaport project funded by the Governments of the Netherlands and France. The Committee was concerned about the official statements by Israeli leaders indicating Israel's intent to continue incursions into Areas "A".

22. During the year, the Israeli authorities have considered "unilateral separation" schemes aimed at further isolating Palestinian population centres from the settlements and restricting the movement of Palestinians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee was much alarmed by the establishment, in late September 2001, of a 30-kilometre-long "closed military zone" in the northern part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, stretching from Jenin to Tulkarm. In the Committee's view, this was an extremely provocative unilateral measure, taken by IDF in gross violation of the signed Israeli-Palestinian agreements. The Committee expressed much concern at the adverse implications this development might have for future talks on permanent status issues. Also in late September 2001, Israel's Ministry of Public Security announced an intention to consider physically separating the settlements of "Pisgat Ze'ev" and "Neve Ya'akov", north of East Jerusalem, from the Shu'fat refugee camp and the nearby Palestinian village of Dahiyat al-Bareed, respectively. The plan of the Jerusalem District police was to erect up to 12 kilometres of fences, a fortification that would include night-vision equipment and other high-tech defences. The Committee strongly opposed this policy, as it represented a new form of collective punishment and created another obstacle to efforts aimed at resolving the crisis.

23. In the period under review, as the crisis persisted, the Committee has observed with great hope and anticipation the intensive efforts mounted by various international parties to hold violence in check, achieve a viable ceasefire and hold it long enough to reach a political solution. To this end, Israeli and Palestinian leaders met with a number of world leaders and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. A series of meetings held in Paris were followed by an important summit at

Sharm el-Sheikh, which was not attended by the Prime Minister of Israel. A way out of the escalating violence and towards the resumption of the peace negotiations was offered through the setting up, on 7 November 2000, of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, headed by former United States Senator George Mitchell. At the start of 2001, the international community made another effort to persuade the two sides to bring about an end to violence, to protect civilians and to resume negotiations. The two sides met at Taba in late January 2001 and agreed on a number of understandings with respect to the situation on the ground and in the peace process. They also achieved a measure of progress by narrowing some gaps on core issues such as refugees, Jerusalem, borders and security. The peace negotiations were suspended in early February, however, following elections in Israel and the refusal of the new Israeli Government to respect the understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba. As the situation continued to escalate, the Mitchell Committee, on 30 April 2001, released a report putting forward a set of practical recommendations the parties should comply with in order to end confrontation and return to the negotiations. The international community expressed renewed hope that both sides, having accepted the report's recommendations, would be in a position to implement them in their entirety. The position of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was that a confidence-building phase that would bring about a sustainable ceasefire was key to ending the confrontation. In this context, the Committee deplored the Israeli Government's tactic of using isolated incidents of violence as a pretext for delaying its compliance with the Mitchell Committee recommendations, such as the freeze on settlement activity. The Palestinian Rights Committee has also emphasized that a concrete framework for the implementation of the recommendations and an independent mechanism for monitoring compliance were urgently needed. Security cooperation between the two sides was perceived as vital for achieving a ceasefire. Several attempts have been made during the year at resuming security cooperation between the two sides, including the proposal made in June 2001 by the United States Director of Central Intelligence, which the Israeli side refused to implement by insisting on a seven-day total ceasefire. The Committee welcomed the visit of the Secretary-General to the region in June 2001 and, in particular, the important meetings he had with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership. The Committee also remained hopeful that the intensified involvement of the co-sponsors of the peace process, EU, regional leaders and the Secretary-General of the United Nations was a most workable way to secure an end to the violence, build confidence and move back to the peace negotiations. As the parties remained deadlocked, the Committee called upon the wider international community to help them out of the impasse. At a meeting between the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority Mr. Yasser Arafat and Israel's Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Shimon Peres, held on 26 September 2001 at Gaza International Airport, the parties discussed their respective actions that would allow them to maintain the ceasefire. In particular, they reiterated their commitment to the Mitchell Report recommendations and the understandings reached earlier in the year with the assistance of the United States Director of Central Intelligence. They also agreed to resume full security cooperation, exert maximum effort to sustain the ceasefire and carry out their respective obligations emanating from previous agreements. Israel pledged to lift closures and redeploy its forces. The Committee welcomed the results of the meeting and the renewal of security coordination and hoped that it would lead to a reduction of violence,

restoration of trust between the two sides and the resumption of serious negotiations on key political issues.

24. A major obstacle to the peace process has been the persistence with which the Israeli authorities have been expanding the illegal settlements and infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. According to the reports available to the Committee, Israel continued its settlement, outpost and road network construction throughout the area in disregard of the strong opposition to such activities expressed by the international community. There has been an alarming increase in the demolitions of Palestinian houses and other property in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Also, most of the IDF incursions into Palestinian-controlled areas were accompanied by the indiscriminate and often massive bulldozing of Palestinian property, both public and private, under various security-related justifications. The Gaza Strip suffered the most from these massive demolitions. In the period from the beginning of the intifada to 12 September 2001, IDF demolished a total of 559 Palestinian residential buildings. In East Jerusalem alone, some 30 Palestinian houses were demolished. A total of 3,669 residential buildings were shelled. In the same period, 112,900 olive trees were uprooted and 3,669,000 square miles of cultivated land destroyed. At least 15 settlement sites have been established or resettled anew in the West Bank since February 2001. Throughout the year, tenders have been issued by the Israeli authorities for the construction of settler housing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. In November 2000, tenders were issued for the construction of 131 housing units in the settlement of "Pisgat Ze'ev", north of East Jerusalem, and for 110 units in "Har Homa", at Jabal Abu Ghneim, south of East Jerusalem; in the same month, Israel's Ministry of Construction and Housing issued tenders for road and infrastructure construction at "Betar Ilit" near Bethlehem. In December 2000, the Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction announced that 1,400 housing units had been started since January of that year. Half of the tenders issued by the Israel Land Administration were earmarked for construction in settlements. For May 2001 alone, tenders were issued for the construction of more than 700 new homes in the West Bank.

25. According to the "Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza", during 2001, the number of settlers in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip has increased by 17,000 and has now reached nearly 227,000. Violence against the Palestinian population and acts of vandalism against their land and other property perpetrated by extremist settlers remained of special concern to the Committee. Individual armed settlers and radical settler groups continued to terrorize and assault Palestinians. Since the start of the intifada, settlers have killed 16 Palestinian civilians. Under the protection or due to indifference on the part of IDF, settler groups often resort to the use of firearms, hit-and-run incidents, torture and beatings of Palestinians. The arsenal of their illegal and criminal activities includes the obstruction of Palestinian road traffic and setting up roadblocks, throwing stones at Palestinian cars, setting Palestinian property on fire, uprooting trees, attacking Palestinian medical crews and journalists, and burning Palestinian places of worship. They have routinely occupied Palestinian land, establishing illegal temporary structures and outposts. In several areas of the West Bank, settlers have instituted armed patrols. IDF has made its opposition to this particular activity clear, but appears to have done nothing to stop it. In late August 2001, monitors of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) became the object of

harassment and violence by Hebron settlers, who have disrupted its operation, forcing the TIPH contingent to scale back its regular patrols of the city. The Committee was seriously alarmed by the dramatic increase in the course of the year of the scope and intensity of settler violence against Palestinian civilians. It has always reiterated that the presence and the activities of the settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, were illegal and violated the established norms of international humanitarian law, including article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

26. The Committee remained much concerned about the plight of some 2,500 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Many of the detainees are often subjected to psychological pressure and physical torture. Forced isolation, administrative detention, sudden night checks and interrogations, restrictions on internal movement and overcrowding have had a highly traumatic effect on the detainees. The Palestinian prisoners also face a lack of religious and educational facilities. The health situation is a cause for great concern. Many suffer from various diseases and surgical operations are frequently delayed. Palestinian prisoners under 18 are exposed to physical assaults by Israeli criminal prisoners with whom they are often jailed. Since the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada, the Israeli authorities have deprived the detainees of their right to family visitations. In addition, lawyers from the areas under Palestinian Authority control have been denied access to Palestinian prisoners since 8 April 1996. Legal assistance and advice are made unavailable to the Palestinian prisoners as a result of this policy. On a number of occasions, the Committee has called on the Government of Israel to abide by its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and to release the prisoners in implementation of the bilateral agreements.

27. The Palestinian economy, in the year of the current intifada, has experienced extreme difficulties and has shown signs of rapid disintegration as a result of the Israeli military occupation. Months of intensive violence and military confrontation as well as protracted closures and restrictions on the movement of goods and the labour force have decimated practically all sectors of the economy. In contrast to previous years, there has been a noticeable shift to emergency assistance and humanitarian aid. Since the beginning of the crisis in September 2000, the Israeli authorities have introduced a policy of recurrent and often prolonged closures, which is viewed as a particularly harsh form of collective punishment. Mobility has been severely restricted on the borders between the Palestinian Territory and Israel, between the West Bank and Jordan, and between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. The closure of borders with Israel has resulted in the closure of the safe passage route established as part of the peace negotiations. Internal closures within the West Bank and Gaza Strip have led to the establishment of a dense network of Israeli checkpoints, which, in turn, has resulted in temporary or permanent traffic disruption and road blockages. The present crisis has considerably offset the gains made by the Palestinian economy in the past several years. Estimates by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority indicate that the total income losses of the Palestinian economy since the start of the intifada range from US$ 1.8 to US$ 2.5 billion. The closures have caused a dramatic rise in unemployment, bringing the rates back to the 1996 levels. Poverty rates were expected to reach 50 per cent by the end of 2001, meaning that half of the Palestinian population would

live on $2 or less a day. The IDF incursions into Palestinian-controlled areas have had a destructive effect on the Palestinian physical infrastructure. Palestinian social services have also been disrupted. The Committee was of the view that in the light of the gravity of the economic crisis and in order to address the situation adequately, the international community would have to renew its commitment to assist the Palestinian people with a view to rehabilitating the economy and infrastructure and bringing about a substantial improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinians. Also in this connection, the Committee stressed the increasingly important role of the United Nations system and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority in coordinating international assistance and emergency humanitarian aid.

28. As was the case in the previous years, water in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained in short supply. Constant water shortages continued to have a harmful effect of Palestinian households throughout the Palestinian territory. Israeli authorities continued to exercise control over Palestinian water resources, with thousands of Palestinian families deprived of connection to water networks. Almost 200,000 Palestinians were forced to rely on alternative water sources. The pervasive restrictions on movement imposed by Israel on the Palestinian population during the intifada, coupled with a sharp deterioration of the economy, have further impeded access by Palestinians to sources of water supply. Restrictive and repressive Israeli actions in the course of the year have affected the water supply situation. During the closures of the Palestinian territory, IDF often prevented Palestinian traffic, including water tanks, from reaching their water suppliers. Settlers have been reported to use their bulldozers to rupture Palestinian water pipelines, whereas Israeli snipers have targeted Palestinian roof water tanks, considered by the Palestinians as an essential alternative to relying on water pipelines.

29. The Committee greatly appreciated and supported the substantial humanitarian work done during the year by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA has provided some 3.8 million Palestine refugees with social services, schooling and health care. In spite of its important and dedicated humanitarian effort, the Agency continued to experience serious financial difficulties. The severe decline in the Palestinian economy and the desperate condition of Palestine refugees since the start of the intifada in particular compelled UNRWA to launch a series of emergency appeals to the international community for funds to be used for emergency operations. In all its activities during the year, the Committee has consistently called for increased international support for the Agency's vital activities and generous financial contributions to its budget. It has also supported UNRWA's appeals for aid to provide food, medical supplies and emergency work programmes for some 217,000 refugee families.

30. Since December 1978, the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP/PAPP) has provided substantial assistance to the Palestinian people. For over two decades, UNDP/PAPP has helped build Palestinian technical capacities, as well as project management and administrative capacities within counterpart Palestinian institutions, including the Palestinian Authority, local government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The Committee has been grateful to UNDP/PAPP for the invaluable and highly effective development assistance rendered to the Palestinian people during these difficult years.

V. Action taken by the Committee

A. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/52

31. In pursuance of its mandate and in response to the difficulties experienced by the peace process and in the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee continued to mobilize the international community in support of the Palestinian people, in cooperation with United Nations bodies, Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and others, as indicated below.

1. Action in the General Assembly and the Security Council

(a) Resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly

32. The Chairman, as well as members and observers of the Committee, participated in the fifth resumption of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, convened to discuss the item entitled "Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory". In pursuance of General Assembly resolution ES-10/6 of 9 February 1999, the emergency special session was resumed on 18 October 2000 at the request of the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of October 2000.

33. The Chairman of the Committee took part in the debate and made a statement, in which he reviewed the situation on the ground and the international efforts to resume the peace negotiations at Sharm el-Sheikh. He also welcomed the particularly important role which the United Nations Secretary-General had played in efforts to bring an end to the violence (A/ES-10/PV.13).

34. At the 14th meeting of the session, on 20 October 2000, the Secretary-General made a statement on the latest developments on the item (A/ES-10/PV.14). At the end of the debate, on 20 October 2000, the General Assembly, by a recorded vote of 92 to 6, with 46 abstentions, adopted resolution ES-10/7, in which it condemned the violence that had taken place on 28 September 2000 and the following days at Al-Haram al-Sharif and other Holy Places in Jerusalem as well as other areas in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, resulting in the deaths of over 100 people, the vast majority of whom were Palestinian civilians, and many other casualties; condemned also acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force by the Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians; expressed support for the understandings reached at the summit convened at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, and urged all parties concerned to implement those understandings honestly and without delay; demanded the immediate cessation of violence and the use of force, called upon the parties to act immediately to reverse all measures taken in that regard since 28 September 2000, and acknowledged that necessary steps had been taken by the parties in that direction since the summit of Sharm el-Sheikh; reiterated that Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, were illegal and were an obstacle to peace, and called for the prevention of illegal acts of violence by Israeli settlers; demanded that Israel, the occupying Power, abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which was applicable to all

territories occupied by Israel since 1967; strongly supported the establishment of a mechanism of inquiry into the recent tragic events, with the aim of establishing all the precise facts and preventing the repetition of those events, and in that regard strongly supported also the understanding reached at Sharm el-Sheikh about a committee of fact-finding, and called for its establishment without delay; supported the efforts of the Secretary-General, including his efforts for the establishment of the above-mentioned committee, and requested him to report to the Assembly on the progress made in those efforts; called upon the members of the Security Council to follow the situation closely, including the implementation of Council resolution 1322 (2000), in fulfilment of the Council's primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security; invited the depositary of the Fourth Geneva Convention to consult on the development of the humanitarian situation in the field, in accordance with the statement adopted on 15 July 1999 by the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Convention, with the aim of ensuring respect for the Convention in all circumstances in accordance with common article 1 of the four Conventions; supported the efforts towards the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations within the Middle East peace process on its agreed basis, and called for the speedy conclusion of the final settlement agreement between the two sides; and decided to adjourn the tenth emergency special session temporarily and to authorize the President of the General Assembly at its most recent session to resume its meeting upon request from Member States.

(b) Security Council meetings

35. Following the events of 28 September 2000 and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifadah that ensued, the Security Council met on 3, 4 and 5 October 2000 to consider the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". At its 4205th meeting on 7 October 2000, the Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000).[7]

36. On 22 November 2000, at the request of the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of November 2000 (S/2000/1109), the Security Council met to discuss the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

37. The Acting Chairman of the Committee participated in the debate on the same day and made a statement on behalf of the Committee. In his statement, the Acting Chairman underscored the very important role played by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the search for a solution to the crisis. On behalf of the Committee, he urged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts. The Acting Chairman also emphasized that Israeli practices and policies denying the legitimate needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people would never be compatible with a legitimate peace process based on resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). There could be no just and lasting peace in the Middle East until the Palestinian people exercised their legitimate right to establish an independent State with its capital in East Jerusalem, until all the occupied Arab territories were returned, and until Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the occupied Syrian Golan, to the lines of 4 June 1967 (S/PV.4231).

38. On 18 December 2000, the Security Council met again to consider the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question"

(S/2000/1206). At the end of the debate on the same day, the Council voted on a draft resolution (S/2000/1171) submitted by the Non-Aligned Movement Caucus (Bangladesh, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mali, Namibia and Tunisia). The draft received 8 votes in favour, none against and 7 abstentions. The draft resolution was not adopted, as it did not obtain the required majority (S/PV.4248).

39. On 15 March 2001, at the request of the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of March 2001 (S/2001/216), the Security Council met to consider the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". Resumed meetings under this item were held on 19 and 27 March 2001. At the conclusion of the debate, on 27 March 2001, the Council voted on a draft resolution (S/2001/270) submitted by the Non-Aligned Movement Caucus (Bangladesh, Colombia, Jamaica, Mali, Mauritius, Singapore and Tunisia). The draft received 9 votes in favour, 1 against and 4 abstentions. One Council member did not participate in the voting. The draft resolution was not adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Security Council (S/PV.4305).

40. At the request of the representatives of Mali and Qatar to the United Nations (S/2001/797), on 20 and 21 August 2001, the Security Council resumed its consideration of the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

41. The Acting Chairman of the Committee participated in the debate on 20 August 2001 and made a statement on behalf of the Committee. In his statement, the Acting Chairman expressed the concern of the Committee at the dramatic escalation of tension and violence in and around East Jerusalem and in areas under full Palestinian control. He stated that Israel had no intentions of abiding by agreements signed with the Palestinian side and had firmly decided on wide-scale military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, as well as in areas under full control of the Palestinian Authority. The Acting Chairman specifically referred to Israel's takeover of Orient House and other Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem and Abu Dis. He added that the Security Council had on numerous occasions failed to take any tangible action in response to the situation on the ground. The Committee believed that the Mitchell Committee report and its recommendations should be implemented in their entirety. A framework for their implementation should be established within a reasonable time span and with the international community monitoring the compliance of both parties. Negotiations on security, as well as consideration of the interim and permanent status issues, should be revived as a matter of urgency. The Acting Chairman said that the Committee was of the view that a permanent status agreement, long overdue, should be finally reached on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) (S/PV.4357).

2. Communications to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

42. In a letter dated 7 March 2001 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/55/827, A/ES-10/62-S/2001/207), the Chairman of the Committee voiced great concern at the continuing violence on the ground and the use of deadly force by the Israeli army and security forces. He said that Israel continued to rely on the use of massive armed response to individual outbreaks of Palestinian protest throughout the

Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Chairman added that the Committee wished to join the rest of the international community in its indignation over the Israeli practice of extrajudicial killings by Israeli security forces of the members of the Palestinian leadership and other Palestinian officials, stating that this policy was contrary to the rule of international law, provoked further violence, led to a crisis of trust and confidence between the two sides and created new obstacles to peace. The Committee was of the view that, with the situation continuing to deteriorate, the international community should act by stepping up its efforts to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people. The Committee also strongly believed that the status quo was absolutely untenable and was firmly rooted in Israel's continued violation of the principles of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the provisions of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. By its actions, Israel had clearly demonstrated its unwillingness to respect the bilateral agreements and understandings reached to date. The Committee viewed with particular concern the dangerously rapid disintegration of the Palestinian economy as a result of various restrictive policies of the Government of Israel. Protracted closures of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, tight restrictions on the movement of people and goods, customs and tax income withholding and other measures of collective punishment had had a disastrous effect on the Palestinian economy as a whole, as well as on individual Palestinian households.

43. In another letter dated 7 March 2001 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/56/59-E/2001/9, A/ES-10/63-S/2001/208), the Chairman of the Committee drew the attention of the Secretary-General to the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, organized under the auspices of the Committee at the United Nations Office at Vienna. The Seminar had been convened in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 55/52 and 55/53 of 1 December 2000. In deciding to devote its first international meeting of the year to this critical issue, the Committee had been guided by the overriding need to address the disastrous situation facing the Palestinian economy after months of violent confrontations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and the dramatic deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinian people. The purpose of the Seminar had been to review the state of the economy and to examine efforts by Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations to alleviate the ongoing humanitarian emergency. The Seminar had also aimed at mobilizing greater support for the attainment of the legitimate economic rights of the Palestinian people in the hope of contributing to the broader peace-building efforts in the region. Given the special importance of the subject matter of the Seminar, it had attracted a great deal of international attention and had been attended by a large number of Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as United Nations family entities. The Chairman also recalled the regrettable fact that the four invited Palestinian speakers, including high-ranking officials of the Palestinian Authority, and several NGO participants from the Occupied Palestinian Territory had been unable to attend this important United Nations gathering owing to the general closure and travel restrictions imposed by Israel. Among those prevented from leaving the Occupied Palestinian Territory was Mr. Maher Masri, Minister for Economy and Trade of the Palestinian Authority, who had been invited as the official representative of Palestine and the keynote speaker of the Seminar.

44. In a letter dated 29 March 2001 addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2001/296), the Chairman of the Committee reiterated the Committee's

continued objection to the deletion from the list of items of which the Security Council was seized those items that related to the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the Palestine question and the Middle East problem, which were of special concern not only to the Committee but also to the majority of Member States. He stated the Committee's belief that pending a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, the core of which was the question of Palestine, in accordance with international legitimacy, those items should remain on the list of matters of which the Council was seized, as they continued to engage its responsibility with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security. He also stressed that any decision to delete the items, especially at the current critical juncture in the peace process, would go well beyond procedural reform and would have far-reaching negative political implications.

45. In a letter dated 5 April 2001 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/ES-10/73-S/2001/335) and in identical letters addressed on the same date to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council (A/ES-10/74-S/2001/336), the Chairman of the Committee reiterated that the Committee was extremely disturbed by the continuing violence and bloodshed on the ground. The reliance of IDF on excessive military power, including artillery, tanks, helicopter gunships and missile boats, in recent days in particular, had resulted in many deaths and injuries. He said that the confrontation was unequal, with a high human cost, especially for the Palestinian people. The Chairman said that, confined to their towns and villages because of the Israeli blockade, the Palestinians were subjected on a daily basis to gunfire, bombardments, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, as well as the destruction of property and infrastructure. Compounding the desperate straits of the Palestinian people were the disastrous state of the economy, the dispossessing effects of the Israeli settlement expansion and repeated closures of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Chairman said that the Committee firmly believed that the international community had a moral responsibility towards the Palestinian people, which had been striving to exercise its inalienable rights for so long. He also said that the Committee appreciated and strongly supported the important facilitating role that the Secretary-General was playing in the peace process and urged him to continue to remain actively and closely engaged with the parties, directly as well as through the United Nations Special Coordinator, in an effort to end the violence and resume the historic dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians.

46. In a letter dated 19 April 2001 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/ES-10/78-S/2001/392) and in identical letters addressed on the same date to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council (A/ES-10/77-S/2001/390), the Chairman of the Committee expressed the Committee's concern at the violence and bloodshed on the ground. He said that the Israeli military attacks had been taken to a new level of intensity, particularly in the Gaza Strip. He referred, in particular, to a massive land, air and sea operation on 17 April 2001, in which the Israeli army had occupied the area, imposed a blockade on Gaza City, dissected the Gaza Strip into three separate parts, advanced at least half a mile into the Palestinian territory and six Palestinian police positions along the eastern border of the Gaza Strip. In the operation, IDF had used heavy machine guns, tanks, armoured personnel carriers, helicopter gunships, artillery and sea-launched surface-to-surface missiles. The letter said that the army had also closed all major roads and

the Gaza International Airport. Palestinian Authority border police positions at Beit Hanoun, an area under full Palestinian control, had been occupied. Rockets had hit buildings in Deir el-Balah and Rafah in the central and southern Gaza Strip, respectively. The Committee was extremely worried by the illegal incursion of IDF into the areas of the Gaza Strip that were under full Palestinian control. The Committee emphasized that the Israeli reoccupation of those parts of the Gaza Strip constituted a clear and serious violation of the agreements signed by the parties as part of the peace process. The Chairman added that the Committee had again urged the Secretary-General to intensify contacts with all the parties concerned in order to help bring the crisis to an end and restart the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. In view of a particularly tense and volatile situation on the ground, efforts within the United Nations to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians had acquired special urgency.

47. In a letter dated 22 August 2001 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/ES-10/106-S/2001/819), the Acting Chairman of the Committee emphasized that the Committee was extremely worried by the latest dramatic escalation of tensions and violence in and around East Jerusalem and in areas under full Palestinian control. He said that Israel had no intention of respecting agreements signed with the Palestinian side and had firmly decided on continuing wide-scale military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as in areas under full control of the Palestinian Authority. The latest and most striking incidents included the taking over of Orient House and other Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem and Abu Dis, and the massive IDF incursion into Jenin. Also, Israel continued to use sophisticated weapons, including helicopter gunships, in the extrajudicial killings of suspected Palestinian activists. The Acting Chairman expressed the Committee's position that the Mitchell Committee report, with its sensible and even-handed recommendations, offered a practicable way out of the impasse. He added that resolute steps were needed with a view to implementing the recommendations in their entirety and without further delay. A realistic plan for such implementation should be agreed upon within a reasonable time span and with workable ways for its monitoring. Negotiations on security, as well as on interim and permanent status issues, should be restarted as a matter of urgency. The Committee was of the view that a permanent status agreement, long overdue, should be finally reached on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference.

48. On the first anniversary of the Al-Aqsa intifadah, in a letter dated 28 September 2001 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/ES-10/113-S/2001/920), the Chairman of the Committee, inter alia, brought to the attention of the Secretary-General the Committee's position with respect to the various developments that had taken place since the beginning of the uprising on 28 September 2000. In particular, he stated that, during those months, over 800 people had lost their lives and thousands had been injured, many incapacitated for life, the vast majority of them Palestinian civilians, including children. The Chairman said that Israel had reacted to the explosion of grievances and frustration by the Palestinians by using excessive force, including combat helicopter gunships, fighter aircraft and other sophisticated materiel, as well as by imposing a stifling economic blockade in order to crush the uprising. In addition to the tragic loss of human life, large parts of the Palestinian infrastructure had been systematically destroyed in the course of the year. Tens of thousands of people had lost their livelihoods and hundreds of thousands had

become dependent for their survival on emergency humanitarian assistance offered by the international community. This had led to a virtual dismantling of the peace process. International efforts to end the violence and bring the parties back to the negotiating table had continued over the past year, regrettably without a lasting effect. The Chairman recalled the intensive international efforts which had led to the establishment of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee headed by former United States Senator George Mitchell. He also referred to the attempts by the United States Director of Central Intelligence to achieve a ceasefire and resume security cooperation between the two sides. The Chairman saluted the close personal engagement of the Secretary-General in efforts to end the violence and resume the peace process. He expressed the hope that the September 2001 meeting between Chairman Arafat and Foreign Minister Peres would become the first step leading to a cessation of violence and the resumption of a sustainable dialogue. He also emphasized that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), along with the principle of "land for peace", should be the basis of any solution of the question of Palestine. On behalf of the Palestinian Rights Committee, the Chairman called upon the Government of Israel to abide by the principles of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the provisions of all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Illegal Israeli policies such as settlement activity, extrajudicial killings of suspected Palestinian activists, closures of and incursions into Palestinian areas should be stopped forthwith and faits accomplis on the ground should be reversed. In the Chairman's view, as the crisis persisted and the parties continued to lack mutual trust and confidence, assistance by key international actors, including the co-sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and leaders in the regions, remained crucial. He reiterated the position of the Palestinian Rights Committee that, at the current critical juncture, the United Nations should continue to maintain its permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine.

3. Participation by the Chairman of the Committee at international conferences and meetings

49. In the course of the year, the Chairman of the Committee participated in meetings of intergovernmental and other bodies and other meetings relevant to the question of Palestine and contributed to their deliberations in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as follows:

(a) Joint Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Non-Aligned Movement Committee on Palestine and the Non-Aligned Movement Security Council Caucus, Pretoria, 3 and 4 May 2001;

(b) International Media Encounter on the Question of Palestine, UNESCO headquarters, Paris, 18 and 19 June 2001;

(c) Seventy-fourth Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity and 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, Lusaka, 5-11 July 2001 (A/56/457).

50. As in previous years, the Committee continued to follow the activities relevant to the question of Palestine of other intergovernmental organizations, as well as decisions and resolutions of United Nations bodies and agencies, including the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights, and the positive efforts made by many Governments. The Committee took note of the declarations of

concern on the part of the international community over the continuing violence on the ground and the lack of progress in the peace process during the year. It was encouraged by the readiness of the international community to remain engaged in the peace efforts and to help the parties out of the crisis of 2000-2001.

B. Action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 55/52 and 55/53

51. In its programme of meetings organized in the various regions, the Committee continued to give priority to promoting the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, supporting the peace process and stressing the need for timely and scrupulous implementation by the parties of the bilateral agreements. The Committee also urged the international community to continue to provide political support as well as broad economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

52. On the basis of the provision contained in General Assembly resolution 55/52, the Committee adjusted its programme of work, as necessary, in order to meet the evolving situation in the most effective and constructive manner, while keeping in mind the continuing financial constraints facing the Organization. The Committee expressed its great appreciation to the Governments of Cuba and Spain for having provided venues and facilities for the events sponsored by the Committee.

53. During the year, the Committee, through its Bureau, continued to maintain its cooperation on the question of Palestine with States members of the European Union. In February 2001, the Bureau held an important and useful meeting of consultations with representatives of EU (under the Presidency of Sweden) as part of the continued effort to build a constructive relationship with EU members on issues of common concern. In accordance with established practice, the Chairman of the Committee briefed the members of the EU delegation on the Committee's ongoing activities and explained the position of the Committee with regard to the situation on the ground, the stalemate in the peace process and the state of the Palestinian economy. He expressed the hope that the two sides would continue consultations.

54. Throughout the year, the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights met at United Nations Headquarters, as well as away from Headquarters, with members of the general public and student groups and briefed them on the various aspects of the question of Palestine and the involvement of the United Nations in this issue.

1. United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People

55. The United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People was held at the United Nations Office at Vienna on 20 and 21 February 2001. The Seminar was attended by representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, United Nations system organizations and agencies, and experts. Four Palestinian officials invited to speak at the Seminar and a number of NGO participants from the Occupied Palestinian Territory were unable to travel to Vienna owing to the general closure imposed by Israel. The Committee delegation expressed its utmost concern and issued a statement denouncing the illegal actions of the occupying Power in that regard.

56. The following topics were discussed by the participants: the crisis of 2000-2001: the impact of Israeli policies on the Palestinian economy; the role of the United Nations system: assessment and efforts to alleviate hardships; assistance by Arab and Islamic States and intergovernmental organizations to the Palestinian people; and efforts by international donors and other sectors of the international community to alleviate the economic hardships of the Palestinian people.

57. In his concluding remarks of the Seminar, the Chairman of the Committee emphasized that the change of leadership in Israel at the beginning of February had undercut the momentum for reaching a final and comprehensive agreement. Since September 2000, the Occupied Palestinian Territory had been suffering under repeated closures, tight restrictions on the movement of people and goods, customs and tax withholding, and other measures of collective punishment imposed by the occupying Power. As a result, the Palestinian economy had suffered greatly and had come to the verge of collapse. The Palestinian people had been reduced to fighting for their survival and for the satisfaction of their basic day-to-day needs rather than working for long-term development. The consequences of that situation were fraught with danger for peace throughout the region. The Committee requested the donor community to contribute the funds needed to remedy the serious budgetary crisis faced by the Palestinian Authority. The Chairman stressed that Palestinian economic rehabilitation and development were prerequisites for peace in the Middle East. For peace to return and take root, a comprehensive, just and lasting political settlement must be coupled with a substantial improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

58. The report of the Seminar was issued as a document of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (A/56/89-E/2001/89) for consideration under the relevant agenda items. It was also issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

2. United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine

59. The United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held at Havana from 12 to 14 June 2001. The participants included representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, United Nations bodies and agencies, special guests from the host country and representatives of the media, the academic community and students. Two invited Palestinian speakers and a number of Palestinian NGO representatives from the Occupied Palestinian Territory were unable to travel to Havana due to the general closure imposed by Israel. The Committee delegation expressed deep regret at their absence and, in a statement, denounced the illegal actions by the occupying Power, which had, among their many grave consequences, a negative effect on international efforts to find a solution to the current crisis.

60. The participants discussed the following topics: the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem; upholding international legitimacy — the path to a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the conflict; and international support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The coverage the Meeting received by the Cuban and the international media was very prominent. Some of the invited experts participated in a TV round table, which was also attended by Fidel Castro, President of the Council of State and of the Council of

Ministers of Cuba. On the last day of the Meeting, Cuban NGOs organized a mass rally in support of the Palestinian people with the participation of some 10,000 Cubans, with the Cuban President among them.

61. At the conclusion of the Meeting, the participants adopted the Havana Declaration, in which the participants, inter alia, declared their broad and determined commitment to support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State and the right to return to their homeland. They emphasized that the excessive use of force by Israel, the closures and the economic blockade must be brought to an end and that international protection, in the form of a United Nations observer force, must be provided. Participants urged the parties to implement swiftly the recommendations contained in the Mitchell report in their entirety as a way of ending the violence, restoring confidence and resuming the peace talks. They reiterated that the Latin American and Caribbean States, having had a broad experience in the struggle for decolonization and national sovereignty, should continue their moral, political and material support for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

62. The Committee delegation met with President Fidel Castro. It was received by Ricardo Alarcón Quesada, President of the National Assembly of Cuba, who welcomed the efforts of the Committee aimed at bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The delegation also met with Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, who delivered the opening address of the Meeting.

63. The report of the Meeting was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

3. Workshop of Latin American and Caribbean NGOs

64. An NGO Workshop organized in connection with the United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held at Havana on 14 June 2001. Its theme was "Action by civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean in solidarity with the Palestinian people". NGO representatives and experts reviewed regional NGO action in the light of the Plan of Action adopted at the 1998 Meeting in Santiago de Chile and efforts by NGOs, religious groups and the media aimed at mobilizing public opinion in support of the Palestinian people and discussed action-oriented proposals and mechanisms for their implementation.

65. In the Plan of Action adopted at the Workshop, NGOs pledged to increase the publication of information materials on the reality of the Palestinian situation and denounce any double standard applied to protect Israel from international condemnation for its human rights violations. NGOs should provide the United Nations Commission on Human Rights with all pertinent information. The Plan called for worldwide observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 2001. The United Nations should provide effective protection for the Palestinian people and demand compliance with the Fourth Geneva Convention. NGOs would lobby their Governments to increase their financial contributions to UNRWA to enable it to continue its services to Palestine refugees. Special emphasis should be given to the situation of Palestinian women living under occupation. NGOs should monitor the information broadcast by the mass media in their respective countries and counter disinformation campaigns that

called into question the justice of the Palestinian cause. The Federation of Arab Entities of the Americas (FEARAB) was called upon to establish an economic assistance fund for the Palestinian people. NGO action in support of the Palestinian people would be reviewed at the Second International Conference of Solidarity with the Palestinian People to be held in Mexico City in the first half of 2002.

66. The report on the NGO Workshop is part of the report on the Havana Meeting issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

4. United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine

67. The United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine: "The Road to Israeli-Palestinian Peace" was held at Madrid on 17 and 18 July 2001. The Meeting was attended by international experts, eminent political personalities from Spain and other countries, representatives of Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system entities, the Palestinian Authority, civil society organizations and the media.

68. The following topics were discussed by the participants: the Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts: an overview; the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem; and the road to peace.

69. In the General Remarks of the Meeting, participants expressed their strong conviction that the recommendations contained in the Mitchell Committee report and the subsequent United States-brokered ceasefire agreement should be swiftly implemented as a whole; that the excessive use of force by Israel, the closures and the economic blockade of Palestinian population centres, the incursions into Palestinian-controlled areas and all other illegal measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people should be brought to an end immediately; that, in view of the excessive use of force against Palestinian civilians and continued Israeli illegal settlement activity, the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should expedite the reconvening of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties; and that an international presence must be established to protect innocent civilians and to monitor the implementation of agreements and understandings reached, with the United Nations Security Council fully discharging its responsibilities under the Charter in this respect. Participants also discussed the role played in the peace process by the co-sponsors, the European Union, the United Nations, regional organizations and other interested international actors and stressed that the role of all those States and multilateral institutions in support of the Middle East peace process remained crucial and had to be closely coordinated for better results, particularly in the current critical period.

70. The Committee delegation was received by Josep Piqué, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain, who stressed the importance of supporting the Middle East peace process and the rights of the Palestinian people. The Committee delegation expressed its deep appreciation of the active and constructive role played by Spain in the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region.

71. The report of the Meeting was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

5. United Nations NGO Meeting in Solidarity with the Palestinian People

72. The United Nations NGO Meeting in Solidarity with the Palestinian People was held on 19 July 2001 in Madrid, immediately following the International Meeting on the Question of Palestine: "The Road to Israeli-Palestinian Peace". The participants included representatives of NGOs from all regions, Governments, United Nations bodies and agencies, intergovernmental organizations, a delegation of Palestine and a number of panellists.

73. In the course of the Meeting, the participants considered action by international civil society in solidarity with the Palestinian people; mobilizing public opinion in support of the Palestinian people — efforts by NGOs, other civil society organizations and the media; also reviewed NGO action worldwide, and developed action-oriented proposals as well as mechanisms for their implementation.

74. In the NGO Statement and Plan of Action, the participants urged the United Nations Security Council to place an international protection force in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and decided to undertake advocacy steps in that regard. In addition, public awareness campaigns should focus on crucial elements of the occupation and the situation of the Palestinians on the ground. NGOs would explore the possibility of establishing an International Civil Society Corps of volunteers, including universities, academics as well as Palestinian and Israeli NGOs, to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, to monitor events on the ground and to participate in appropriate actions opposing the occupation. The participants expressed their conviction that the relevant United Nations resolutions offered the clearest pathway to a true and just peace for all in the region.

75. The report of the NGO Meeting was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

6. Cooperation with civil society organizations

76. The Committee continued to emphasize throughout the year that the role of civil society in educating their respective constituencies about the fundamental issues of the question of Palestine and in mobilizing public support for the Palestinian cause remained very important. NGOs continued to participate in all meetings organized by the Committee away from Headquarters and in the observance of the International Day of Solidarity in New York and elsewhere. Aware of the challenges of the current circumstances, the Committee was particularly appreciative of those NGO contributions that were focused on mobilizing international solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for the achievement of its inalienable rights, as well as supporting the peace process and the work and objectives of the Committee. The Committee highly appreciated the work of those NGOs that provided concrete emergency relief at a difficult time for the Palestinian people. It appealed to the Israeli NGOs and activists that are part of the peace camp and encouraged them to continue and to invigorate their crucial activities to inform public opinion and to provide an alternative to the dangerous course embarked upon by the Israeli Government. The Committee stressed that there was a greater need for sustained campaigns aimed at informing public opinion about the root causes of the conflict and promoting national and international action in support of the peace process, the effective implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements, and of a just and lasting peace in the region.

77. The Committee encouraged cooperation, coordination and networking among civil society organizations. It maintained and developed its liaison with national, regional and international coordinating mechanisms accredited to it, in addition to the already established liaison with a large number of individual NGOs. Consultations between the delegation of the Committee and representatives of coordinating committees of NGOs were held on 22 February 2001 at the United Nations Office at Vienna, following the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People. The Palestinian NGO representatives were unable to participate due to the general closure imposed by Israel on the Occupied Territory. The participating NGO representatives provided information about their initiatives, campaigns and projects and stressed the need for close cooperation with the Committee. The delegation of the Committee asked the NGOs to focus their current work on the mobilization of emergency relief and other assistance by the international donor community; and lobbying their Governments to live up to their responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention and to support initiatives at the United Nations and elsewhere to establish a protection force to be deployed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

78. The Division for Palestinian Rights maintained the Internet web site entitled "NGO Network on the Question of Palestine" as a permanent tool of mutual information and cooperation between civil society and the Committee. The web site can be found at www.un.org/depts/dpa/ngo. The Division also continued to issue its bimonthly newsletter entitled *NGO Action News* covering the activities of civil society on the various aspects of the question of Palestine.

7. Research, monitoring and publications

79. The Committee continued to attach great importance to the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights and requested it to continue its established programme of work, including studies, information notes and other publications; the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

80. Accordingly, the Division continued to respond to requests for information and to prepare and disseminate to its worldwide network the following publications:

(a) Monthly bulletin covering action by the Committee, United Nations bodies and agencies, and intergovernmental organizations concerned with the question of Palestine;

(b) Monthly chronology of events relating to the question of Palestine, based on media reports and other sources;

(c) Reports of meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee;

(d) Special bulletin on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People;

(e) Annual compilation of relevant resolutions, decisions and statements of the General Assembly and the Security Council relating to the question of Palestine;

(f) Update of a study entitled "Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, 1917-1988".

8. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

81. The Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with relevant technical and library services of the United Nations Secretariat, continued to develop UNISPAL, as mandated by the General Assembly since 1991. This included the required ongoing upgrading of the system's hardware and software components; the scanning, retyping or downloading, editing, reformatting and inclusion in the system of new and old documents; the improvement of quality control mechanisms; and the further development and improvement of access to the "UNISPAL" and "Question of Palestine" sites on the Internet, in particular, as requested, to enhance the user-friendliness of the system.

9. Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

82. Two staff members from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority participated in a training programme conducted by the Division from September to December 2000, in conjunction with the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. They familiarized themselves with various aspects of the work of the United Nations Secretariat and other organs. The programme included, among other things, attendance at various briefings and meetings of relevant committees and bodies of the United Nations, meetings with representatives of delegations to the General Assembly and members of the staffs of permanent missions to the United Nations. The trainees also conducted research and prepared studies on specific topics.

10. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

83. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed on 29 November 2000 at United Nations Headquarters and at the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Office at Vienna. On the occasion of the observance at Headquarters, in addition to a solemn meeting of the Committee and other activities, an exhibit entitled "The Land" was presented by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, under the auspices of the Committee. The Committee noted with appreciation that the International Solidarity Day had also been observed in many other cities throughout the world. Details on the observance are contained in the special bulletin issued by the Division.

84. In adopting its programme of work, the Committee decided that a similar event would be organized in connection with the observance of the Day in 2001.

VI. Action taken by the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/54

85. In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 55/54 of 1 December 2000, the Department of Public Information continued its special information programme on the question of Palestine, which included, among other things, the organization of its annual training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists and the organization of an international media encounter on the question of Palestine at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris.

86. In October-November 2000, the Department organized a training programme at United Nations Headquarters for a group of nine Palestinian media practitioners with a view to strengthening their professional capacity as information media personnel. As was the case since the beginning of the programme in 1995, the Department arranged a series of briefings and workshops at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs in New York and at CNN headquarters in Atlanta. Briefings for the participants were also organized at United Nations Headquarters, at international organizations and at institutions of the Government of the United States of America in Washington, D.C. As part of their training, the participants covered meetings of the General Assembly and transmitted radio, TV and print reports back to their news organizations in the Middle East.

87. Since January 2001, the Department has been displaying at the United Nations Office at Geneva, on a semi-permanent basis, the French-language version of the exhibit entitled "The United Nations and the Question of Palestine", containing photographs, maps and text on the history and situation of the Palestinian people and tracing the search for a solution to the question of Palestine. Its English-language version is a permanent part of the guided tour route at United Nations Headquarters.

88. In April 2001, the Department produced a poster entitled "Palestine: Self-determination — An Inalienable Right of the Palestinian People" in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The poster has been distributed worldwide through the network of the United Nations field offices.

89. On 18 and 19 June 2001, the Department organized at UNESCO headquarters, Paris, the International Media Encounter on the Question of Palestine designed as a forum, at which international media representatives and experts discussed the status of the peace process and ways and means of breaking the deadlock. The Encounter discussed the role of the United Nations in the question of Palestine and in the overall search for peace in the Middle East. The Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, among other participants, addressed the Encounter. It attracted international media coverage, including daily dispatches by major wire services and contributions by participating correspondents. A separate web site created on the occasion was posted on the Department's home page. The Encounter was the ninth in a series launched by the Department in 1991 to support the search for peace in the Middle East and raise international awareness about the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

90. In its PeaceWatch section, the quarterly publication *UN Chronicle* (issue No. 3, 2000) reported on the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly; the Secretary-General's trip to the Middle East in October 2000 and his reports to the General Assembly and the Security Council; and meetings and

resolutions of the Security Council on the subject. It also reported on the three-day special session of the Commission on Human Rights on the Middle East. In its issue No. 4, 2000, it reported on the reaffirmation by the General Assembly's Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the importance of UNRWA. The issue also contained an article on how UNRWA, through its various projects, had helped both men and women take steps towards achieving sustainable development, along with a summary of the achievements of UNRWA for the past 50 years. An article reviewing peacekeeping events in 2000 reported on Security Council meetings on the situation in the Middle East. The PeaceWatch section contained an account of the Secretary-General's visit to the Middle East in June 2001 and the recommendations of the international Fact-Finding Committee as well as an appeal by UNRWA for funds to bring food, medical supplies and other assistance to the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza.

91. The Department produced and distributed one "UN in Action" TV programme entitled "Palestine Football Makes its Mark with United Nations Support". It was broadcast on the CNN World Report programme and on other networks worldwide.

92. The Radio News Unit continued to cover extensively various aspects of the question of Palestine and related issues in its daily broadcasts and current affairs magazines in various languages. Also, the Middle East Radio Unit continued to cover all United Nations activities related to the question of Palestine in its 15-minute daily broadcast in Arabic. Some of the topics covered included: the extraordinary special session of the General Assembly and its subsequent resumed sessions on the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory; the Secretary-General's three visits to the area, two to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and one to the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit; the visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the follow-ups to her report; the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People; the Security Council debate on agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question"; the Arab summit calling for a protection force for the Occupied Palestinian Territory; the United Nations reaction to the developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular, the emergency measures adopted by UNRWA, UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO); the effects of violence on refugees, children and women in the Occupied Territory; and the analysis of the situation by think tanks, scholars and experts on both sides. A two-part series of an English-language feature programme entitled "The Question of the Right of Return for Palestinian Refugees" was adapted into Hindi, Indonesian and Urdu. A magazine entitled *How has the violence in Israel and Palestine affected the children*? was produced in English.

93. As has been the case in recent years, the activities of United Nations information centres (UNICs), information services (UNIS) and other United Nations offices have primarily focused on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The UNICs in Athens, Beirut, Bonn, Cairo, Dar es Salaam, Dhaka, Harare, Islamabad, Kathmandu, Lisbon, New Delhi, Ouagadougou, Prague, Pretoria, Rabat, Rome, Tehran, Tripoli, Tunis, Vienna and Warsaw observed the Day with wide range of activities. Among other activities undertaken by UNICs was UNIC Harare's launch of the UNESCO Bethlehem 2000 roving photo exhibit in May 2001. The Director of the Centre and the Ambassador

of Palestine delivered welcoming statements at the three-week event, which was officially opened by the Vice-President of Zimbabwe. In Colombo, the UNIC Director delivered a speech on the theme of "The United Nations and the Question of Palestine" to a group of university students in an event organized in cooperation with the Department of International Relations Studies of the University of Colombo. UNIC Madrid provided assistance to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA during his two-day visit to Spain and arranged for interviews with two main dailies, *El Pais* and *El Mundo*. The Centre also assisted the Division for Palestinian Rights and conference services in their planning mission to Madrid in preparation for the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine: "The Road to Israeli-Palestinian Peace". UNIC Panama City arranged for the publication of a supplement entitled "The United Nations and the Question of Palestine" in the international section of a monthly newsmagazine. In March 2001, UNIC Sana'a translated and disseminated to the local media an appeal by UNRWA for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. The Director of UNIC Tehran gave an interview to the national radio of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the outbreak of violence between Israelis and Palestinians and focused on the Secretary-General's efforts to try to restore the Middle East peace process. In November 2000, two publications, "United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development" and "The Middle East Peace Process", were produced by UNIC Tunis and distributed to media and government officials. In coordination with the Department, UNIC Paris contributed to the organization of the International Media Encounter on the Question of Palestine. UNICs have also taken advantage of the Internet as an important public outreach vehicle to promote a better understanding of the question of Palestine. A number of centres, such as UNIC Tunis and UNIC Rome, created special pages on their web sites carrying the Secretary-General's message, as well as press releases and other information material covering the various aspects of the issue.

94. UNIS Geneva has regularly disseminated information on the question of Palestine. At the weekly briefings to journalists, the Director of the Information Service highlights statements from the Secretary-General and the Security Council on the Palestine question. UNIS Vienna provided public information support for the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People and disseminated the statement of the representative of the Secretary-General, Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. It also assisted in organizing interviews and the issuance of daily press releases.

95. From 28 to 30 August 2000, the NGO Section, in its fifty-third Annual Conference for Non-governmental Organizations associated with the Department entitled "Global Solidarity: The Way to Peace and International Cooperation", invited as a keynote speaker Ms. Hanan Ashrawi, Secretary-General, Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, at the opening session of the Conference.

96. The Department created a United Nations archival database on Palestine, covering the period from 1947 to 2000, for the automation of the card catalogue of the Department's collection of films and videos on Palestine. The overall objective of the project is to transform the current archive materials into a searchable database.

97. The Department continued to cooperate with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights in implementation of the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee

98. At the start of the twenty-first century and more than five decades after the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, the Palestinian people is yet to see the promise of its own State fulfilled. Thirty-four years after the illegal occupation by Israel of its land, the Palestinians are yet to see their aspirations for self-determination and the exercise of their inalienable and natural rights realized. Ten years after the Middle East Peace Conference held at Madrid and in spite of the progress made in the first few promising years, the peace process relapsed and now remains at a standstill, with both sides far apart on key issues. To this day, millions of Palestine refugees carry on with their dismal existence in refugee camps, deprived of their natural right of return to the places from which they have been displaced. The gains that the Palestinian economy experienced when the peace process was advancing are now all but gone. The economy, already in a disastrous state, is being gradually destroyed by the occupying Power. In these circumstances, the Committee intends to persist in its efforts to contribute, through its varied programme of activities, to international endeavours aimed at stopping the violence and bringing the parties back on the peace track. Its overriding and fundamental objective and mandate — the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights — will remain key to all its activities.

99. In the course of the year, the Committee has been greatly distressed by the intensification of the crisis and, as a result, the tragic loss of innocent lives, the wide-scale destruction of Palestinian property and the alarmingly steady deterioration of the economy. The Committee joined the international community in expressing grave concern over the policies and actions of Israel, the occupying Power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, namely the illegal settlement policy; military incursions unprecedented in scope into the various parts of the Palestinian Territory, including areas under full Palestinian control, as stipulated in relevant bilateral agreements; excessively harsh and disproportionate attacks by IDF against the Palestinians protesting the occupation; the widespread policy of targeted extrajudicial assassinations of Palestinian activists; and the harmful effect of the occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people. As the core of the conflict remains the continuing illegal occupation by Israel of the Palestinian Territory, the Committee reiterates its position of principle that the problem should be resolved based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as other relevant United Nations resolutions and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including its right to self-determination and its own independent State.

100. The deplorable events since September 2000 have also underscored the urgency of pressing forward with efforts to bring calm, stabilize the situation and enable the parties to resume their dialogue. The Committee views with great regret and growing alarm the breakdown in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. It welcomed the Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba understandings with a measure of anticipation and hope that those small but important steps would allow the parties to overcome their differences and restore the dialogue. The Committee called for the immediate and comprehensive implementation of the Mitchell Committee recommendations, as offering the most practicable route back to the peace process. Although both sides have accepted the report, the crisis persisted, preventing the

parties from resuming their negotiations on critical interim and permanent status issues. The Committee calls upon the co-sponsors of the peace process and all concerned to continue to pursue their efforts, looking for innovative approaches that would allow the parties to implement the Mitchell Committee recommendations and resume their negotiations. The Committee believes that a stepped-up and concrete engagement on the part of key international parties, regional and extra-regional, is now needed more than ever.

101. In the light of these developments, the Committee shares the view that action aimed at addressing the present situation is also required by the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. It supports the ongoing effort to reconvene the Conference of the High Contracting Parties in order to ensure respect for the Convention and provide the necessary protection to the Palestinian people.

102. At this critical crossroads in the peace process, the Committee reaffirms its long-standing position that the United Nations should continue to maintain its permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions, in accordance with international legitimacy and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. In this context, the Committee strongly believes that both the General Assembly and the Security Council should do everything in their power to help resolve this five-decades-old conflict, allowing the Palestinian people, at long last, to exercise its rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State of its own. The Committee welcomes and strongly supports the increasingly important and highly instrumental role in the overall peacemaking efforts played in the course of the year by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Committee also expresses its appreciation of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority for his persistent efforts aimed at bringing the parties together and for his important work of coordinating international assistance to the Palestinian people carried out by his Office. The Committee considers it unacceptable that UNRWA, which has provided generations of Palestinians with social services, schooling and health care, is now experiencing serious financial difficulties. In this connection, the Committee strongly urges the international donor community to assist the Agency and contribute generously to its budget. This should enable UNRWA to continue to deliver its vital humanitarian services to some 3.8 million Palestine refugees registered with it.

103. The Committee considers that its programme of meetings in various regions continues to play a useful role in heightening international awareness of the relevant issues and in achieving wider support for the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights. The Committee also highly appreciates the contribution made by a large number of NGOs working untiringly to mobilize solidarity with the Palestinian people, provide emergency relief under difficult circumstances to the population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and raise international awareness of its inalienable rights, in particular the right of return. There is a greater need for sustained campaigns at various levels aimed at informing public opinion about the root cause of the conflict — the illegal occupation by Israel of Palestinian land. In addition to civil society initiatives and given the tense and volatile situation on the ground, special emphasis should be laid on mobilizing wide public support for measures aimed at protecting the Palestinian people, such as action by the United

Nations and its Security Council or by the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. In its programme of work for the next year, the Committee will strive to involve to a greater extent other sectors of civil society, such as parliamentarians and their regional and international organizations and the media. Its cooperation with the wide network of NGOs on the question of Palestine will be intensified and focused on issues of common concern. The Committee will continue to review and assess its programme with a view to making it more responsive to the developments on the ground and in the peace process. It will focus its work in the next year on the question of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, on efforts to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and the role of the United Nations therein, and on international assistance to the Palestinian people.

104. The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, in particular the further development of the UNISPAL documents collection. The Committee also considers that the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority has demonstrated its usefulness and requests that it be continued.

105. The Committee is of the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion on the relevant issues. The Committee requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

106. Wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, the Committee calls on all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/31/35).

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/32/35); ibid., *Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/33/35); ibid., *Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/34/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/35/35); ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/36/35); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/37/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/38/35); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/39/35); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/40/35); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/41/35); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/42/35); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/43/35); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/44/35); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/45/35); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/46/35); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/47/35); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/48/35); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/49/35); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/50/35); ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/51/35); ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/52/35); ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/53/35); ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/54/35); and ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/55/35).

[3] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 75, No. 973.

[4] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/55/35), chap. VII.

[5] A/AC.183/2001/CRP.1.

[6] The observers at the Committee meetings were as follows: Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Yemen, League of Arab States, Organization of the Islamic Conference and Palestine.

[7] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/55/35), paras. 29-31.

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